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ABSTRACT

A sample of 472 superintendents in New York State participated in this study, which examined the presence of sex discrimination in the selection of secondary school principals. The superintendents were asked to rate a hypothetical applicant resume that included credentials and a photograph. A hypothetical job description of a secondary school principal and a questionnaire were also included in the packet. The results of the study indicated no difference based on gender in the ratings of applicants with identical qualifications. In a follow-up investigation, 59 superintendents (from the original sample) who had hired one or more secondary principals during the 1980-81 school year were interviewed concerning their hiring experiences. The majority of these superintendents stated that few female applicants were qualified for the job, an assertion the researchers were unable to confirm or refute. The study reaches no conclusions about the presence or absence of sex discrimination in hiring practices, but suggests that the small number of women hired as secondary school principals in New York State may be due to an insufficient number of women applying for the position and to continued sex discrimination. (Author/WD)

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The Influence of Gender in the Selection of Secondary School Principals

by

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Research of the past decade suggests a great many barriers to women entering educational administration. Studies cite such barriers as: low self image/lack of confidence (Schmuck, 1975); lack of aspiration/motivation (Miller, 1976; Perrin, 1974): lack of support and encouragement (Baughman, 1977); family and home responsibilities (Schmuck, 1975); lack of preparation/experience (Capps, 1976; Perrin, 1974); lack of finances to continue training (Edson, 1981); too few role models (Davis, 1978); lack of sponsorship (Poll, 1978); and lack of network (Davis, 1978).

The barrier that was identified in perhaps the largest body of research which prevented the entry of women into administration was sex discrimination. A number of studies (Baughman, 1977; Capps, 1976; Fleming, 1974; Gardner, 1977; Moore, 1977; Owens, 1975; Poll, 1978; Pruitt, 1976; Shakeshaft, 1979; Way, 1976) have documented discrimination by school boards, professional educators and administrators as a practice which has prevented or hampered women from entering the field of educational administration.

There is a belief by some that sex discrimination has been devoured by the forces of the '80's (affirmative action, the feminist movement, raised consciousness of educators) and that it no longer stands as a major barrier stemming a growing tide of women into administration. Others call this wishful thinking.

One arena for pronounced sex discrimination in administrative hiring in the past has been secondary public schools. The staffing, especially of the leadership positions in these schools, has resulted in women being significantly underrepresented. In 1978, women comprised 46% of secondary school teachers, yet only 7% of secondary school principals were women (Howard, 1980).

The purpose of this study, therefore, was to examine the influence of gender in the selection of secondary school principals in an effort to explore whether sex discrimination is still an issue in hiring school administrators.

While sex discrimination has been studied using a number of approaches, one method has been repeatedly used (Zikmund, 1978 and Fleming, 1974). This approach seeks to document discrimination in the evaluation of resumes submitted for administrative positions.

In the Zikmund study, for instance, resumes for accounting positions were sent to 100 personnel directors of corporations; applicant gender and two levels of scholastic performance were systematically varied so as to yield four different resumes, one of which was sent to the personnel director. The gender of the applicant was identified as obviously female (Linda) or unspecified (L.C.). The grade point average was either that of a high performer (3.8 out of 4.0) or average performer (2.8 out of 4.0). Both the number of replies to the resumes and the number of positive responses

were significantly greater for the "unspecified resume" than for the "female resume." The frequency of positive responses were also significantly greater for the "higher performer" resume.

Fleming's doctoral work completed at Arizona State University (1974) involved an assessment of employment practices toward women administrators in institutions of higher education. As in the Zikmund study, two resumes were rated by university officials, identical in every way except that one contained a female name, the other a male. The male applicant received significantly greater scores in each of the four areas presented on the resume -- education, experience, professional memberships, honors,awards, and publications -- despite the identical nature of the credentials.

These studies served in large part as a model and motivation for the research to be reported here which sought to determine if such overt sex discrimination as reported by Fleming and Zikmund still exists.

Procedures

The target population for this investigation was superintendents or chief school officials for all 690 public school districts in New York State (Directory of Public Schools and Administrators in New York State, 1979-80). To guard against the possibility of poor respondent return, to

insure workable cell sizes (minimum of 30 responses per cell), and to incorporate a wide margin of safety, the size of the random sample employed was 585. The response rate was 81.7%; thus, 472 superintendents participated in this study. Each received a packet which contained a direction page, a job description for senior high school principal, a hypothetical resume of an applicant for this position including questionnaire items, and a photograph of the applicant in question. The direction page consisted of specific and detailed instructions for completing the instrument. Superintendents were reminded to rate the listed credentials without regard to resume construction or format (see Appendix A). The job description was a brief one page listing of the major functions and responsibilities for the hypothetical position of senior high school principal (see Appendix B), and the resume was one page in length with credentials listed under the headings of: 1. Education, 2. Experience, 3. Professional Memberships, Honors and Awards, and 4. Community Involvement (see Appendix C). A five point rating scale was included with reference to the above mentioned job description. Superintendents could rate the candidate's credentials, in each of the areas, from excellent (5) to unsatisfactory (1).

In an effort to analyze the effects of candidates' height and weight, in addition to their gender, on their appropriateness for the administrative position, a group

photograph of males (see Appendix D) or a group photograph of females (see Appendix E) in six height-weight categories was included. In this manner, the gender of the hypothetical applicant was not only varied, but the stature or body build as well. The six males or females pictured in the photograph were either Type I - tall and of ideal weight; Type II - tall and overweight; Type III - average height and of ideal weight; Type IV - average height and overweight; Type V - short and of ideal weight; and Type VI - short and overweight.

The superintendents were randomly assigned to one of 12 groups, with each superintendent receiving a transmittal letter, and hypothetical resume for a male or female applicant. The appropriate group photograph was enclosed and indication was given as to which of the persons pictured (stature types) was the applicant in question. The resume remained identical, except for appropriate changes in name (Stephen or Stephanie Michaels) and height and weight information. Additionally, a control resume was sent to another group of superintendents; this resume included no height or weight information and no group photograph.

The validation of the direction page, job description, and resume was based on a model developed by Fleming (1974). In addition, a validating panel of six superintendents, not part of the random sample of the study, was allowed to react to the wording and clarity of the direction page,

the appropriateness of the job description, and the strength of the credentials, as well as to offer possible suggestions and recommendations. This validation panel of six superintendents was asked to confirm that the male applicants in one photograph and the female applicants in the other photograph were, with the exception of height and weight, relatively alike in terms of dress, facial expression, attractiveness, and age.

To minimize final sample bias, effort was made to maximize the percentage of respondents. Five hundred and eighty-five questionnaires were mailed on January 7, 1981, to superintendents randomly selected from the population of New York State superintendents. On January 21, 1981, two weeks later, a postcard was mailed to all superintendents who had not yet responded, reminding them of the request to have the questionnaire completed. February 4, 1981, a second and final mailing of the questionnaires was sent to the remaining non-respondents along with a new cover letter emphasizing the urgency of their reply. One month later and two months from the date of the original mailing, the predesignated deadline for responses was met (March 4, 1981). The return rate was 81.7% or 472 responses.

Results

There was no significant difference between the mean total rating received by all males compared to the mean

total rating of all females (see Table 1). Neither was there any significant difference in the mean total ratings received by the males or females when compared to the mean total ratings of those in the control group. In addition, there were no significant differences uncovered in the ratings received by the males and females within each stature type (see Table 1).

Summary of the Findings

Resumes identified as belonging to a male, female, or with no indication as to gender of applicant did not receive significantly different ratings.

Although the resumes received different mean ratings when the hypothetical applicant's height and weight were varied (six possible stature types), the ratings received by the males and females within each stature type were not significantly different. (For a full discussion of the findings on stature type see Bonuso, 1981).

Follow-up

These findings marked a turn-about from the somewhat similar studies of Fleming (1974) and Zikmund (1978); however, the results prompted a new set of questions. What did this study tell us? The finding that male and female resumes received similar ratings on identical credentials,

Table 1

Ratings by Superintendents of Male and Female Resumes

Comparison	Number of Cases N	Mean $\bar{X}$	Pooled t	2-tail prob. p	Practical Significance
All Males	223	14.16	0.34	0.731	.000
All Females	209	14.16			
Type I Male	35	16.66	0.11	0.912	.000
Type I Female	37	16.59			
Type II Male	38	14.25	0.12	0.905	.000
Type II Female	35	14.17			
Type III Male	37	15.11	0.60	0.551	.005
Type III Female	35	14.81			
Type IV Male	40	14.00	-1.00	0.320	.014
Type IV Female	34	14.63			
Type V Male	35	13.37	1.03	0.305	.015
Type V Female	36	12.68			
Type VI Male	38	11.74	0.78	0.438	.009
Type VI Female	32	11.09			

where in the past identical resumes manipulating gender of applicant received dissimilar scores, might mean that sex discrimination had come to an end. After all, females were rated no differently than the males. On the other hand, this study may not have reflected actual behavior of school superintendents; while they gave lip-service to equity, superintendents might not be hiring women. Thus, it was decided to do a follow-up investigation to the intial study to determine more precisely the study's significance.

The target population for this follow-up investigation consisted of the superintendents or chief school officials from the list of those responding to the original survey (472) who had actually hired a new secondary principal during the year in which they responded to our inquiry. Through an examination and comparison of the 1979-80 and 1980-81 Directory of Public Schools and Administrators in New York State, it was determined that 59 districts had recorded changes in one or more secondary principals during the 1980-81 school year; 90.9% of those were men and 9.1% were women who filled the positions.

A telephone survey of the superintendents of the 59 districts that had hired a secondary principal was conducted in which the following research questions were asked:

- Who from your district was involved in the final level interview?
- How many candidates were involved in the final level interview? How many of these were women?

- What are your observations concerning the number of female applicants applying for your administrative vacancies?

Follow-up Results

All 59 of the districts were contacted during 3 days of the survey; 26 (or 44.1%) were available to respond to the survey.

In response to the question, "Who from your district was involved in the final level interview?" superintendents and boards of education were cited overwhelmingly as being delegated this responsibility (see Table 2).

The total number of candidates involved in the final level interviews in these 26 districts was 90, 86 of which were male (see Table 3). Very few women were involved in the final level interview. Approximately 4.5% of those receiving interviews were women; this is comparable to the percentage of women who finally achieved the actual position of secondary principal in these districts (7.7%).

In response to the question, "What are your observations concerning the number of female applicants applying for your administrative vacancies?" the vast majority of superintendents cited "few, if any, qualified female applicants" (see table 4).

Discussion

In the first study reported, the mean total rating by superintendents of candidate qualifications on identical

Table 2

Personnel Involved in Final Interview for Secondary School Principalship

Personnel	Number of Districts
Board of Education Member	17
Superintendent	15
Assistant Superintendent	1
Principal	1
Building Representatives	1

Table 3

Candidates Involved in Final Interview

	Female n (%)	Male n (%)	Total n (%)
Final Interview	4 (4.5)	86 (95.5)	90 (100)
Accepted Principalship	2 (7.7)	24 (92.3)	26 (100)

Table 4

Perception by Superintendents of Female Secondary School Principalship Applicant Pool

Perception	Number of Superintendents
Few, if any, qualified female applicants	13
No observations/Not qualified to say	6
Number of females has increased measureably	1
Other	2

resumes identified as being male, female, or unspecified gender were not significantly different. This finding led the researchers to conduct a second study to determine if this signified an end to sex discrimination in secondary principalship hiring practices, or if it was merely an indication that although overt signs of bias have disappeared, sex bias itself has not.

Of the districts contacted which were involved in the original study and in which secondary school principals had actually been hired, 92.3% of the new principals were male and 7.7% were female. A look at second level evidence, those who made it to the final interview stage, found 95.5% male candidates and 4.5% female candidates. Although a majority of superintendents claimed that the reason few females were hired was because of "few, if any, qualified female applicants," we were unable to either confirm or refute this assertion. Since we could not examine the gender and credentials of the initial pool of applicants, all we can surmise from these studies is that while superintendents in New York State were indicating no preference for one gender over another applying for the hypothetical job of secondary school principal, at the same time these same superintendents were filling 92.3% of their real openings for secondary school principals with men. Women were neither receiving the jobs nor participating in final level interviews for these jobs.

The question of the existence of sex discrimination, then, has not been answered. We do not know if there was a pool of female applicants for the positions studied. Since 46% of all secondary school faculties are female and since the percentage of women in administrative training programs in New York State is approaching 50%, we believe that pool exists. Because we are unable to document the existence of this female applicant pool, we are left with two rival hypotheses to explain the paucity of women hired for the position of secondary school principal in New York State: either sufficient women candidates did not apply for the position, or sex discrimination still exists. Probably, a combination of the two explains the absence of women in secondary school administration.

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Appendix A

Directions

1. Please complete all areas outside of double line on Resumé (page 3). Evaluate the candidate in each of the following four areas:

   Education

   Experience

   Professional Memberships, Honors and Awards

   Community Involvement

   based on the competencies required for the position of Senior High School Principal detailed in the Job Description (page 2). Mark each area of credentials individually on the lines provided to the left, using the following scale:

   (5) Excellent

   (4) Good

   (3) Fair

   (2) Poor

   (1) Unsatisfactory

2. Please complete the questions at the bottom of the Resumé (page 3).

3. A photo of the hypothetical applicant is enclosed for your information. The applicant is indicated in the group photo with a dot placed above the head.

4. Please return this resumé folder in the enclosed stamped, self-addressed envelope.

Please remember you are rating the worth and appropriateness of the credentials and <u>not</u> the construction or format of the resumé.

Appendix B

Job Description

SENIOR HIGH SCHOOL PRINCIPAL

The Principal is charged with the administration, supervision, and operation of the individual school program. It is his/her responsibility to see that the school functions within the framework of policies of the local School Board and the State Board of Education. S/he is expected to provide leadership to his/her staff and assists in interpreting the educational program in the community.

MAJOR FUNCTIONS

1. Supervise activities of Assistant to the Principal relating to the planning, organizing, and operation of special services, such as counseling, psychological services, and testing.

2. Oversee the compilation of budget estimates and the conduct of business operations specifically delegated to the school.

3. Recommend staff appointments and assign personnel to carry out the curricular program.

4. Exercise the supervisory and evaluation function for all staff employees within the school, utilizing staff employees and Central Staff members as necessary to obtain pertinent facts and render sound judgments.

5. Assure the proper care and safeguarding of school property, equipment and supplies, and the maintenance of safe and healthful conditions at all times.

6. Supervise activities relating to student organizations, and extra-curricular activities.

7. Supervise the planning, developing, implementation, and evaluation of instructional program and materials.

8. Maintain continuing communications and liason with parents, parent groups, civic and community sources to achieve understanding and support for school programs and goals.

Appendix C

Resumé

Personal Data

Stephen Michaels — Ht.
63 North Drive — Wt.
Massapequa, New York 11758
(516) 541-6398

Circle One: 5 4 3 2 1

Education

B.A. SUNY at Albany	Liberal Arts	1966
M.Ed. New York University	Secondary Ed.	1971
School Administrator and Supervisor Certificate (SAS) New York University	Ed. Admin.	1974

5 4 3 2 1

Experience

Social Studies Teacher, Massapequa High School	1971 - 1978
Department Chairperson Social Studies, Massapequa High School	1978 - 1979
Assistant Principal, South High School, Valley Stream, New York	1979 - Present

5 4 3 2 1

Professional Memberships, Honors and Awards

Bachelor of Arts Cum Laude
National Association of Secondary School Principals
National Education Association
Phi Delta Kappa

5 4 3 2 1

Community Involvement

Administrative Liaison to PTA, Valley Stream
Citizens Advisory Committee on Finance to Massapequa School Board
Nassau Shores Civic Association

Would you consider this applicant for the position stated? Yes _____ No _____

Why or why not?

Appendix D

Appendix E